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A FEW PASSING WORDS

ON THE

KONCANI DIALECT

AS SPOKEN IN

GOA.

BY

ANDRE PAULO DE ANDRADE,

GRADUATE, GRANT MEDICAL COLLEGE,

KNIGHT OF THE ORDER OF ST. GREGORY THE GREAT,

KNIGHT COMMANDER OF THE ORDER OF N. S. DA CONCEIÇAO

DA VILLA VIÇOSA,

FELLOW AND LATE EXAMINER TO THE

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A TERRA FLAGELADA

Preface.

The following few pages contain an abridged account of the origin and advantage of the Koncani language, which according to some writers, is a corrupt form of Sanscrit itself, and according to others, an independent language mixed with Sanscrit, Marathi, Hindustani and Portuguese words, which have been gradually incorporated into it since people came and settled at Goa. I regret I have been able to give but a meagre account of the language of my forefathers, for which I have to crave the indulgence of my readers.

Bombay, Sept: 1892.

THE KONCANI LANGUAGE.

The word Koncani is derived from *Koncan*, which means the land extending from Bassein to Goa,* and from the borders of the Arabian sea to the foot of the Ghauts. It is distinguished from the *Deccan* by being situated in low land, while the latter forms a plateau in India. Many centuries ago, a number of people migrated from different parts of India and settled in Goa, where they became farmers. Several groups settled in each of the villages, when they became owners of land, and members of an Association called *Communidade*, which assumed ownership of the soil, as if its members were the legitimate landholders, and let their fields to the highest bidders amongst themselves every three years. Thus they became a small secluded community living on farming, which they regarded as the noblest occupation for man. The territory of Goa was then ruled by a Hindu Rajah of Honore, and subsequently by that of Bijapore. Some centuries afterwards, whilst Goa was ruled by a Mahomedan Prince of Kanara, Idal-

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* There are various opinions with regard to the extent of Koncan from north to south. According to some English writers, Koncan is divided into the northern and the southern Koncan, the former extending from the southern boundary of Damaun to the territory of Bankote, known by the name of Thanna Collectorate, and the latter from the river Savitri to the territory of Goa, being called the Ratnageri Collectorate.

David Sinclair says that Konean is that extensive lowland of Maharashtra country which extends from the foot of the Ghats or Sahyadri Mountains to the western coast, its northern limit being the river Tapti and the southern the town of Sadashiwgar. The Maharashtra country stretches on the north from Surat along the Tapti as far as Nagpur, then taking a southerly direction along the Wardha and Wainganga, and from thence a waving line to Sivadasagarh (Sadashiwgar), forms its southern boundary. On the west it is bounded by the Arabian sea.

kan, and twelve years after their discovery of India the Portuguese took possession of Goa, and it is worth mentioning here that the inhabitants then supplicated to the great Alphonso de Albuquerque not to impose upon them any higher land-tax than what they had been contributing to their former sovereigns. This generous and benign conqueror accepted their prayer; and it is a most remarkable fact in the history of the Portuguese sway in India, that for the last 400 years the Indian subjects of His Most Faithful Majesty, the King of Portugal, have been paying into the Public Treasury the same land-tax or *foros*.

The original language of the Koncan, which is spoken as their mother-tongue by the inhabitants of Goa, is a conglomeration of the different corrupt forms of Sanscrit brought in by the inhabitants from the many parts of India, from which they came and settled at Goa, although it is popularly believed to be cognate to the now widely spoken Marathi.

Is the Koncani language at all a corruption of Marathi and other Indian languages? This is a *vexata questio*.

If I were asked my humble opinion on this point, I should be disposed to say that the Koncani language is not a corruption of the Marathi tongue, but a distinct cognate language derived from Sanscrit. Being now very much mixed with Marathi words, it looks like a corrupt form of Marathi. Many fundamental words are found in Koncani, which have never been used in Marathi. I shall give two or three words to the point:—

The word *Hăo* for the personal pronoun *I* in the nominative case, the word *Vuch* or as we Christians pronounce it *Woch*, go, and the word *Poot*, a son, are derived from Sanscrit, but they are not found in Marathi,

in which language their respective equivalents are *mee*, *zá* and *mulga* or *zheel*. There is another word *Uzò* उझो or fire, which is not found in any other Indian language but the Koncani.

If the Koncani were originally derived from Marathi, these four words and many others, which might be cited, would not have been found in it. Whence did these words come? Some clue may be found in the Hindustani and Cutchee. These two languages express the first personal pronoun by *Hum* and *Hāo* respectively. Hence and on some traditional grounds it is conjectured that the Goa-population, whose language is Koncani, might have migrated from Bengal and Cutch. It may be said that what is called Koncani *proper*, is confined to the Goa people only, especially the inhabitants of Salsete, Bardez and the Islands of Goa, and to the population emigrated therefrom. I may add that the first letter of the Marathi or Devanagri alphabet, namely अ *a short*, is pronounced alike in Bengal and in Goa, exactly as the Portuguese *o short*, so the word *Caetano* is pronounced in Koncani as *Coitan*; *Mathias* as *Motee*; *Ghur*, (घर) a house, is pronounced as *ghor*, and so on.

If the Koncani language is to be preserved and reduced to writing, it must be taken from the Christians of Goa, and not from the Hindoos, whose pronunciation and vocabulary have been very much changed by close contact with their co-religionists in the surrounding Marathi-speaking country. The Christians who by reason of their religion have been debarred from intercourse with the Marathi-speaking Hindoos, have probably preserved the language in its original purity as much as possible.

This is one of the cogent arguments why the Chris-

tian population of Goa should be proud of their own mother-tongue—the Koncani, and try their best to study it *per fas et nefas*, and this not only through the Devanagri but through the Roman characters, which also are useful for the proper pronunciation of its words.

When the Portuguese conquered Goa, they gradually introduced the Protuguese language by establishing primary schools for the education of the people. But their clerical teachers gave them instruction in the catechism of the Christian doctrine through the Koncani language, and in so doing, they taught them to read and write it in Roman characters. They even published several pamphlets in the Koncani language but Roman characters, which are read up to the present day by many poor Christians, some of whom have had also rudimentary education in the Portuguese language, while others are able only to spell Koncani words in Roman characters. I may mention here that although the Home Government had sent orders to introduce in the College of Rachol and others schools in India the study of the native language, the Goa Government did not think it fit to introduce a systematic teaching of the Marathi or Koncani amongst the inhabitants of Goa, nor did the latter care to cultivate their own vernacular, as most of them studied their catechism only as it was taught them by the parish-priests and their assistants. It is to be regretted that neither the Government nor the clerical teachers deemed a study of the Koncani through the medium of the Devanagri or Roman characters necessary at any time during the last 400 years. On the contrary, some years after the publication of the books and pamphlets in the Koncani language, the Government and, according to others, the Holy Inquisition of Goa ordered

forthwith to burn all the Koncani works, just as the Mahomedans, in ancient times, fanatically burnt the famous Library of Alexandria, because they thought that its precious works did not at all contain any better knowledge or higher truth than their Koran ! !

That was certainly an excessive and unreasonable rigour in religious opinion. But if we take into account the bigotry of the age when this occured, it is not surprising that even the most learned men or a benevolent Government should err. The Portuguese then hated the very name "Koncanis" as mere heathens, hence the Government of the time desired that the converted people should study Portuguese and give up their native dialect. These remarks are required by candour, in palliation of the acts of our rulers and of our spiritual superiors of that epoch, and not to justify their unwarrantable acts towards the natives of India.

It is but justice to mention here the illustrious names of some of the authors who in by-gone days published various works on Koncani, and they were all members of the Society of Jesus.—Fathers Thomas Stevens, Diogo Ribeiro, Antonio de Saldanha and João de Pedrosa. And their visitor or the delegate of the General of their Order, Father Alexander Valignan, while in Goa, gave an impulse to the study of that language in the College of Rachol.

The late Portuguese *savant* and secretary to the Governor General of India, Joaquim Heliodoro da Cunha Rivara, has also done justice to the mother-tongue of my ancestors; for in his *Ensaio Historico da Lingua Concanim* published in 1858 he has treated of the mechanism and grammatical forms of that language and demonstrated that its grammar published in former years

is founded on sound principles. He also re-printed the *Arte da Lingua Canarim* of Fr. Thomas Stevens.

It is only since the year 1889 that a monthly journal, denominated *Udētechē Salok*,* has been published in Poona, under the patronage of the Societies of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Apostleship of Prayer in the Koncani language through the medium of Roman characters, modified for the purpose on account of the peculiar form of the pronunciation of certain words, which perhaps can only be represented by the Devanagri characters. There were some who brought forward an objection to this publication on the ground of the impracticability of the language being written and pronounced with the Roman characters, for as I mentioned before, there are words in the Koncani language which cannot be written or pronounced when printed in those characters; but, as a majority of the members of the above mentioned Societies at the special meetings held on the 16th October and 23d December 1888, at the Ornellas school and convened by Mr. E. B. de Souza, the Secretary to the Managing Committee, agreed to the proposition, the journal was forthwith started. For this monthly journal in the Koncani some new Roman characters were coined in order to adapt them to the pronunciation of some words in the Koncani language. These new signs being dedicated to Mary, the Holy Mother of God, were called *O Alphabeto Mariano*, or the Alphabet of Mary. I may add, the paper is well accepted in British India, as well as in several villages of my native country of Goa; the more so because it explains the different mysteries of the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

* The words *Udētechē Salok* mean the Water-Lily of the East. This journal now gives also an article on its own history in Portuguese, and is much improved.

and of the Apostleship of Prayer in addition to interesting news of the day.

This monthly paper—*Udētechē Salok*—is issued regularly from the year 1889, but as it mostly contains articles on religious rather than political subjects, two other weekly journals in the Koncani language—the *Concanim*, and the *Luso-Concanim*—have of late been started in Bombay through the medium of pure Roman characters; and all these three journals are widely circulated amongst the Indo-Portuguese or Goa communities throughout India.

It may perhaps be the opinion of some of my countrymen that the people of Goa would be better able to read their vernacular language if they were educated through the Devanagri characters only, but in the present uneducated state the best plan, I think, for them is to learn their vernacular through the medium of Roman characters as well. "Experience is the best master," and we evidently see that all those, who understand Roman characters, can pick up the different words of the Koncani, as printed in the above-mentioned journals. Thus the *Udētechĕ Salok*, the *Koncanim* and the *Luso-Concanim* have indirectly given an impulse to the reading of prayers in the Koncani by the poor people of the country. There is no doubt that if the bulk of the population of Goa had from the commencement of the European sway been educated to read the vernacular language through the Devanagri characters, they would by this time have been able to read and write in those characters as most of the people of civilized countries do. But as mentioned above, they were not educated to do so either by Government or by their spiritual teachers. Hence they are, I think, right in reading

and writing the Koncani language through Roman characters. It is to be hoped that at least in future our benign Government will establish vernacular schools in the various villages of Goa and the New Conquests by introducing a systematic study of the respective languages through the Devanagri and the Roman characters. The Government have established a Marathi school only in the towns of Bardez, Ilhas and Salsette provinces. In the New Conquests or the territories acquired by Government within the last century there is a sprinkling of Marathi schools only attended by some Hindu boys, no stimulus being given to the Christian population of those provinces. Unless Government endeavour to give an impulse to their education in Koncani, Marathi, or Portuguese language, they will remain ignorant of either. I think that the best plan of introducing education both in the New and Old Conquests in the Koncani and Marathi languages would be to establish schools in both the languages and offer some scholarships and prizes to those who distinguish themselves in the examination. The surest way for the natives of Goa to learn their vernacular is through the Devanagri as well as Roman characters, and not through the Devanagri characters alone as at present. While regretting that my countrymen should for so many years have remained ignorant of their vernacular, I should now sincerely wish that our paternal Government would take steps to open a number of schools in the Koncani as well as Marathi and Portuguese languages in the many villages of the provinces of Portuguese India.

According to the opinion of many an ancient writer, Goa was in former ages a celebrated city in India, where people flocked from various parts for different purposes,

and Sanscrit and Koncani being the spoken languages were then cultivated and highly apreciated, but it is to be deplored that by a frequent change of the rulers of that territory, both the languages were at last doomed to fall in pieces, the Koncani being the only language spoken but without any systematic study of it up to the present time. It is now the earnest wish of my countrymen that Koncani should be studied to the same extent as in those pristine days.

Only lately a branch to an association denominated "The Indian Christian Association " has been formed under the leadership of Dr. Jose Octaviano Pires for the purpose of establishing schools in Koncani for the education of children at Goa through the Devanagri characters. It will be a nursery, where the children of either sex will be able to learn reading and writing Koncani in Devanagri characters. This laudable project of my patriotic countrymen confirms my statement that the present generation are anxious to cultivate their mother-tongue in a systematic way in order to bring it up to the same level as the other Indian languages and to educate their children to the level of the current advanced times; and it is hoped that under the benign and paternal Government they will soon attain their national and heartfelt object and their ardent educational desire.